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General Assembly
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Official Records

68th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 8 December 2004, 11.30 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

Agenda item 55 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (A/59/565 and A/59/565/Corr.1)

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly held its debate on this agenda item together with agenda item 45 at the 58th to 60th plenary meetings, on 22 and 23 November 2004.

Before proceeding further, I would like to inform members that immediately following the adjournment of this meeting, there will be an informal meeting of the Assembly on the report of the High-level Panel.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: Members of the General Assembly received last week the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, entitled "A more secure world: our shared responsibility". I think it is an excellent report. It provides a new and comprehensive vision of collective security for the twenty-first century. One of its key messages is this: because of globalization, we live in a world of interconnected threats and mutual vulnerability between rich and poor, and weak and strong. No country can afford to deal with today's threats alone, and no threat can be dealt with effectively unless other threats are addressed at the same time.

To do this, we need global policies and global institutions that are efficient and effective. The United Nations has done a good job in many instances and is often undervalued. But it needs change — perhaps radical change — if it is to meet the challenges to come. It is hardly possible to overstate what is at stake, not only for this Organization but for all the peoples of this world, for whose safety this Organization was created. If we do not act resolutely and together, the threats described in the report can overwhelm us.

Do we want the human cost of HIV/AIDS to accumulate to the point where societies and States collapse? Do we want to face a future cascade of nuclear proliferation? Next time we are faced with genocide, will we again resign ourselves to watching passively until it is too late? Do we want to raise our children in a world where small groups of terrorists can murder hundreds of thousands at any moment?

The answer to all those questions must surely be a resounding no. And that means getting serious about prevention across the full range of threats that we face. Either we turn our backs on the very notion of collective security or we must work hard to make sure that collective security really means something and that we are able, in a practical and decisive manner, to lay out a new agenda and act on it in the years to come.

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We cannot fool ourselves that this will be easy. I challenged the members of the Panel to take up the toughest issues that divide us and to give me recommendations that are far-sighted but possible. They have risen to that challenge, and now the burden falls on you, the Member States. It is up to you to act on their recommendations and to make 2005 the year of change for the United Nations.

As members know, the Panel has made a variety of recommendations. Some are within my purview to implement and I will move ahead quickly to do so. In particular, I intend to take the lead, as the Panel has asked me to do, in promoting a new comprehensive, principled strategy against terrorism. I will present the outlines of this strategy for the Assembly's consideration in the new year.

Other recommendations, such as those related to the reform of the Secretariat, have budgetary implications. On these I stand ready to provide the Assembly with more detailed recommendations and, based on the Assembly's guidelines, a plan of implementation.

Forgive me if at this point I pause to give special emphasis to one of the Panel's recommendations: the one in which it urges Member States to support and fully fund the proposed Directorate of Security and to accord high priority to assisting me in implementing the new staff security system in 2005. Recent events have taught us, in the most painful way imaginable, how necessary that is, and rigorous investigation has shown that the losses we have suffered are in large part due to defects in our security system.

Those defects must be remedied. Let me remind the Assembly once again that United Nations staff serve in dangerous environments not for my satisfaction, nor yet for their own, but because you, the Member States, have decided that their work is needed there. Unhappily, we cannot, in this increasingly volatile and dangerous world, carry out the mandates that you give us without adequate security arrangements. I therefore appeal to you once again to back those mandates with the decisions on security that they clearly entail.

Some of the Panel's recommendations are addressed to different parts of the United Nations system: to various principal organs or to the specialized agencies. I trust that each will take them up and consider them with due urgency, and I will discuss this with the heads of those agencies and programmes. And some, finally, are broad policy recommendations, such as those on the linkage between security and development.

It is important now that all Member States have the opportunity to make their voices heard in this General Assembly and to deliberate among themselves on all aspects of the report. I know that Members are considering discussions around clusters of issues, and I commend that approach.

In March, I will submit to the Assembly my review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. In it, I will draw heavily on the ideas in the Panel's report. But I will also draw on the Assembly's discussions over the coming months. It is my hope that the summit to be held next September will be comprehensive in scope and will be able to reach decisions on the important policy issues.

But, as I stressed in my note transmitting the report last week, there are many recommendations that do not need to wait until September. Where we can reach agreement and act sooner, we should not hesitate to do so.

I said that 2005 is important. It is, indeed, critical. We must make progress and come to agreement on the changes we need in this Organization. It is not simply a matter of making the Organization better; it is a matter of confronting, in the only way possible, the real and present dangers that lie in wait for us.

That task will last well beyond 2005. I look forward to working with all Members, not only to make this coming year a success, but to embark on processes of dialogue and reform, which will need to continue in the years ahead.

Finally, let me express once more my gratitude to the Chair and members of the Panel and the research team for the excellent work they have done. From the circumstances when use of force is legitimate to the definition of terrorism, they were able to find a common position, despite the wide differences in their backgrounds, on issues which for years have divided and paralysed the international community. I find that very encouraging. It gives me hope that the nations of the world, acting through their representatives here, can make a similar effort to overcome their differences

and thus give new meaning and validity to the name "United Nations".

The President (*spoke in French*): The Secretary-General has just received a rare and precious standing ovation from the General Assembly. I interpret that lengthy acclamation as an expression of Members' support for his actions and of their confidence in him and in his work at the helm of the United Nations.

In a world beset by doubt, confusion and, at times, confrontation, the Secretary-General has always remained a point of reference and a source of inspiration and wisdom for millions of people throughout the world. It is therefore unreservedly that I, too, join in that vivid act of homage. Moreover, I see in that expression of support the firm attachment of States Members to the ideals and values of the United Nations, in particular at this critical time in our history.

The report that the Secretary-General has just introduced bears clear witness to his resolve to contribute towards the adaptation of our Organization to the realities of a world undergoing deep changes and o ensure that it becomes an ever more effective instrument, allowing us collectively to meet threats old and new and the challenges of this century. Once again, I warmly congratulate the Secretary-General on his significant initiative.

I also wish to congratulate all the members of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change for the bold recommendations and clarity of vision they evince in the report for building a safer world of greater freedom and solidarity. I also note with particular interest the role which the report accords to the General Assembly as a forum for dialogue among nations in the quest for appropriate solutions to the problems confronting humankind. All Members will certainly take account of the recommendations set forth for the reform of the United Nations, especially throughout the preparatory process for the meeting of the High-level Panel scheduled for September 2005.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 55.

The meeting rose at noon.